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ABSTRACT

The Evaluation Services component of the Education Service Center, in San Antonio, Texas, evaluated nine Special Education programs conducted by the Center. It was decided to evaluate the actual impact of these reports, which examined the programs' major accomplishments. The thirty professional staff involved in the programs were surveyed. Fifty percent of the staff agreed that Evaluation Services had had a positive impact on their programs. However, their ratings and comments clearly reflected a need for specific improvement in the conduct of the evaluation process. Data are given on the findings of the survey and the actions taken by Evaluation Services. A copy of the survey instrument is appended. (JD)

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WHO EVALUATES THE EVALUATOR? - A CASE STUDY OF EVALUATORS
PRACTICING THEIR PRECEPTS

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Never look down to test the ground before taking your next
step: only he who keeps his eye fixed on the far horizon
will find his right road.

Dag Hammarskjöld

Markings

During 1978-79, the Evaluation Services component at Education Service Center, Region 20, evaluated nine Special Education programs conducted by the service center. These programs were designed to support LEAs in their efforts to provide appropriate educational programming for handicapped students. The nine programs were funded at about 1.25 million dollars; somewhat over 5% of the funding was allocated to Evaluation Services.

The evaluations were designed to answer a variety of questions specific to each program's objectives and activities; however, the questions can be grouped under the following general questions:

- (1) How many hours of service were provided?
- (2) How many pupils of which type were served?
- (3) What was the service that was actually provided?
- (4) Which aspects of the service were of value to clients?
- (5) Which aspects of the service could be improved?
- (6) Did students benefit from the services?
- (7) What services do clients need?

Evaluation Services' reports addressed the major accomplishments of the programs. But, like many evaluators today, we did not trust our judgment of the impact of these reports on special education programs. We decided to check out our perceptions by conducting a self-evaluation.

Evaluation Services surveyed the thirty professional staff involved in these programs. Fifty percent of the professional staff agreed that Evaluation Services had had a positive impact on their programs. However, their ratings and comments clearly reflected a need for specific improvement in the conduct of the evaluation process. The following Using Evaluation Data pages document our 1978-79 findings and the actions we took. (Appendix A contains a copy of our survey instrument).

USING EVALUATION DATA

FINDINGS*	ACTION
A) The most frequent comment made in response to open-ended items seeking ways for Evaluation Services to improve centered on increased understanding of people, programs, and the constraints. Typical comments were Evaluation Services had "very little concept of what my work actually consists of", and that Evaluation needs to "become more familiar with...guidelines and program directives" and more "understanding of demands placed on staff". B) Almost as frequent were comments on Evaluation Services' perceived negativism. Special Education staff perceived a "feeling of surprise by Evaluation Services at positive Evaluation findings", and they requested "more positive wording in evaluations". C) Other important but less frequent comments included the following" Special Education staff and Evaluation Services should work together. Program staff requested that "Evaluation find out what kind of data Special Education wants and how they want it presented", and they also suggested that "project staff become aware of all aspects of evaluation".	Evaluation Services in developing Evaluation Plans for Special Education programs will formally budget time for getting to know staff and programs. This would include site visits to observe the program, attendance at staff meetings, and background reading as well as discussion. Evaluation Services will report all data and subjective impressions in a less judgmental, more objective style. This applies to both written and oral communications. Any judgments made by Evaluations Services will be labelled as judgments of the evaluator working on the program. One, and only one, Evaluation Services staff member will be the primary "evaluator" for each special education project. All contact will go through this person. This staff member will ensure that program staff are involved in developing and have copies of the evaluation plan and that they understand each evaluation activity. Project staff will be kept informed of progress in the evaluation; they will share in decisions, reviewing drafts and instruments.

*Action means concrete policy, procedures, decisions, or assignments.

"No action" may be justified but should be explained for the record.

USING EVALUATION DATA

FINDINGS	ACTION
Special Education staff suggested that Evaluation Services "eliminate useless evaluation at (the) end of workshops and evaluate participants' classroom use of the information".	Evaluation Services will limit workshop evaluation to (A) those specified in the Evaluation Plan, and (B) those requested by Special Education personnel as providing useful information to them (up to a certain limited number).
D) Analysis of responses to both the open-ended and the rating items revealed that Special Education staff felt the major benefits of evaluation were work on needs assessment and objectives.	Evaluation Services will continue to conduct an annual region-wide needs assessment focusing on involving to a greater degree Special Education staff and reporting the findings to the LEAs. Evaluation Services staff will also continue their direct involvement in the development of program objectives.
E) Program improvement was seldom <u>explicit</u> in the comments on major benefits.	Evaluation Services will (1) budget time for planning use of evaluation data, (2) focus on explicit formative evaluation questions, and (3) maintain logs of work with program staff on use of evaluation data.
F) Fifty percent (13) of the professional staff agree or strongly agree that Evaluation Services has had a <u>positive impact</u> on programs. About 32% (8) are neutral, and 18% (5) disagree.	Evaluation Services has developed a set of objectives (see next page) for 1979-80 for its work with special education programs; these represent Evaluation Services' plan for improving its impact and provide for a re-evaluation of Evaluation Services at the end of the 1979-80 program year.

*Action means concrete policy, procedures, decisions, or assignments.

"No action" may be justified but should be explained for the record.

FIVE YEAR OBJECTIVES FOR EVALUATION
OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

NOTE: These objectives have been set as long-range ones and designed to be "tough to meet" but, once met, would assure us of the impact of Evaluation Services.

- Objective 1: Special Education staff responsible for programs (coordinators, managers, and certain consultants) will have used information provided by Evaluation Services to improve special education programs. Accomplishment of this objective will be evidenced by at least two-thirds of the program staff interviewed citing "limited" to "extensive" impact for at least three of the six areas measured per document by the instrument "Impact of Evaluation Services" (Part II, 0's 1-6) with at least one area per document rated as having "marked" or "extensive" impact. The instrument will be administered by an external consultant for three select documents per program. *
- Objective 2: Special Education staff will report increased impact of Evaluation Services on special education programs. Accomplishment of this objective will be evidenced by an increase of at least 0.5 standard deviation units (mean from 3.5 (1978-79) to 4.0 (future) on the item "Evaluation Services has had a positive impact on ESC-20 special education programs with which I am familiar" (Strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" on a 5-point scale with 3 = "neutral").
- Objective 3: Evaluation Services staff will have better working relationships with ESC-20 special education staff. Accomplishment of this objective will be indexed by at least two-thirds of the special education staff responding "agree" or "strongly agree" (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) to items on the Evaluating Evaluation services survey addressing Evaluation Services' (a) lack of negativism (b) understanding of Special Education programs, staff, and constraints, (c) ability to work productively with program staff, and (d) desire to have Evaluation Services for the program they are assigned.

* Lack of resources prevented interviewing sufficient staff to measure this objective.

1979-80 RESULTS

Having reviewed the 1978-79 findings, decided upon a course of action, and set 1979-80 objectives, we were most eager to see the 1979-80 results. (See instrument in Appendix B). We were quite pleasantly surprised. First, with respect to objective 3, bettering our working relationships, which we considered antecedent to using evaluation results to improve a program:

TABLE 1

Ratings of Evaluation Services' Working Relationships with Special Education

ITEM	PERCENTAGE AND MEAN OF "AGREE" OR "STRONGLY AGREE"	
	Z	X
Work with me to find out what kind of information I want.	86	4.3
Keep me informed of the progress of the evaluation.	95	4.5
Present findings in a positive, constructive way.	86	4.2
Work with me to interpret and use evaluation findings.	81	4.4
Make a positive effort to understand my program, my goals, and the constraints I am facing.	95	4.4

Note -- based on a N of 21

Furthermore, hardly any of the respondents indicated on the second or third open-ended item that they have experienced any particular problems with Evaluation Services. However, three staff members did suggest that the method of charging for evaluation be changed; they felt that charging a set percentage of the program budget for evaluation is not the best way to fund those services, that charges should be based on the nature and amount of service needed. This was the only response made by more than one project staff member to these items.

We also collected data on another antecedent to using evaluation results to improve a program: selecting and communicating useful findings.

TABLE 2

Ratings of Evaluation Services' Communication of Potentially Useful Findings

ITEM	PERCENTAGE AND MEAN OF "AGREE" AND "STRONGLY AGREE"	
	%	X
Evaluation Services' written reports highlight those findings that could lead to improvement of our services.	90	4.4
Evaluation Services' staff highlight in discussion those findings that could lead to improvement in our services.	85	4.4

Note -- based on an N of 21

Second, with respect to objective 2, program staff reports of the impact of Evaluation Services:

TABLE 3

Ratings of Evaluation Services Impact on Special Education Programs

ITEM	PERCENTAGE AND MEAN OF "AGREE" AND "STRONGLY AGREE"			
	1978-79		1979-80	
	%	X	%	X
The presence of Evaluation Services has had a <u>positive impact</u> in improving programs with which I am familiar.	50	3.5	75	4.0
Based on my experiences with Evaluation Services, I believe Evaluation is a necessary and important service.	-	-	65	4.0

Note -- 1978-79 data based on an N of 22 and 1979-80 on 20

Furthermore, respondents could cite in response to the first open-ended item benefits of evaluation. These were, in order of frequency:

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TABLE 4.

The most important benefits or services I receive from Evaluation Services are...

BENEFITS	FREQUENCY
<u>Information on program achievements and accomplishment of objectives</u>	12
"keeping in touch with whether we are meeting the requirements of program goals"	
"statistical data such as how many clients served"	
<u>Information to help in planning/program improvement</u>	7
"an objective data collection and analysis system useful in program development"	
"good input for program modification"	
<u>Technical assistance/data interpretation</u>	6
"figuring out new ways to get information I want"	
"data processing assistance"	
<u>Exchange/clarification of ideas</u>	4
"exchange of ideas and clarification of reasoning"	
"good sounding board"	
<u>Needs assessment</u>	4
<u>Help with writing objectives</u>	3

At the same time we conducted the 1979-80 Evaluation of Evaluation Services we were developing our goals for evaluation. Since our perspective was one of using evaluation data, our goals were oriented toward the ultimate goal of action on evaluation findings. We came to hypothesize, in our setting anyway, three key variables related to action: Quality of our working relationships, the selection of key findings, and joint planning of action in response to findings by evaluation and project staff. Unique to our setting because of the nature of our finding were two other goals: Spending an appropriate amount of time on each evaluation and getting our reports out on time.

The following page contains our goal statements and a schematic showing their interrelationship. This page is followed by a report -- goal by goal -- of each goals' operationalization into an objective and the results of our 1979-80 survey. Based on this work we are planning a new survey, for 1980-81. Appendix C contains a draft of this instrument.

Three caveats are necessary:

1. 1979-80 data are based on eleven programs the majority of which were in one program administrative area, and all under one evaluation manager. We do not expect our data to be as flattering this year as we will be assessing as many as forty programs in several program administrative areas and under several evaluation managers.
2. Because we have no resources to conduct this study, i.e., it is an add on task, we had to use a survey form. Far more desirable would have been independent interviews supplemented by content analysis of our work.
3. Because of increased institutional demands on our time (5%) and the inflation in our wages and supplies (15%), we will have at best 80% of our 1979-80 resources available to do evaluation work in 1980-81.

GOALS FOR EVALUATION

- (1) Evaluation Services staff account for each program's share of evaluation time by working the appropriate number of hours on that project by the project end date.
- (2) Evaluation Services staff complete the final evaluation report (including review and release) by the project end date.
- (3) Evaluation Services staff develop positive and productive working relationships with program staff.
- (4) Evaluation Services reports findings highlighting those which could be the basis for action by program staff to increase the quantity and quality of service they provide.
- (5) Evaluation Services assists program staff in planning action based on evaluation findings, action which, if implemented, would increase the quality and quantity of service per unit of program cost.
- (6) Program staff act on relevant evaluation findings to increase the quantity and quality of services per unit of program cost.

HOW THE GOALS FOR EVALUATION RELATE TO USING EVALUATION DATA IN THE PROCESS OF IMPROVING PROGRAMS

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| (1) Time on Task | (3) Working Relationships |
| (2) Timely Reporting | (4) Selection of Key Findings → (6) ACTION |
| | (5) Joint Planning of Action |

IMMEDIATE GOALS

Evaluation Services staff account for each program's share of evaluation time by working the appropriate number of hours on that project by the project end date.

Objective 1: "Evaluation Services...(same as goal)...as documented on the Weekly Time Accounting System".

1979-80 Data: We met this goal for each one of our eleven evaluations.

Evaluation Services staff complete the final evaluation report (including review and release) by the project end date.

Objective 2: "Evaluation Services...(same as goal)...as documented by the release date on the cover memo to final reports".

1979-80 Data: Eight of eleven reports were released on or before their due date; the other three reports were released 1.5, 2.0, and 3.5 weeks late. A twelfth report, a second Adult Education report (program statistics) could not be completed until four months beyond its scheduled date because of missing documentation.

Evaluation Services staff develop positive and productive working relationships with program staff.

Objective 3.1: Evaluation Services staff will have better working relationships with ESC-20 project staff. Accomplishment of this objective will be indexed by at least two-thirds of the judgments of project staff being "agree" or "strongly agree" (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) on items of the Evaluating Evaluation services survey addressing such topics as Evaluation Services' (a) lack of negativism (b) understanding of programs, staff and constraints, and (c) working with program staff to (i) find out what they want, (ii) keep them informed of evaluation's program, and (iii) interpret and use findings.

1979-80 Data: Based on the responses of 27 staff (17 special education consultants, 4 non-special education consultants, and 6 project managers/coordinators) across the five items in Part II addressing this objective 89% of the judgments made were "4" or "5" and the mean judgment was 4.4.

Objective 3.2: Evaluation Services staff spend, on the average evaluation, 5% of their time in interaction with project staff as documented by code 07 on the Weekly Time Accounting Form.

1979-80 Data: Data collection did not start until 1980-81

INTERMEDIATE GOALS

Evaluation Services reports findings highlighting those which could be the basis for action by program staff to increase the quantity and quality of service they provide.

Objective 4: "Evaluation Services...(same as goal)...as evidenced by at least two-thirds of the judgments of project staff being "agree" or "strongly agree" to items on the Evaluating Evaluation Services survey addressing our written and verbal highlighting of findings that could lead to improvement in servicing.

1979-80 Data: Based on the responses of 27 staff (17 special education consultants, 4 non-special education consultants, and 6 project managers/coordinators) 92% of the judgments made on the two items addressing highlighting findings were "agree" or "strongly agree" and the mean judgment was 4.3.

Evaluation Services assists program staff in planning action based on Evaluation findings; action which, would increase the quality and quantity of service per unit of program cost.

Objective 5: "Evaluation Services assists program staff in planning action based on evaluation findings; action which, if implemented would increase the quality and quantity of service per unit of program cost as evidenced by at least two-thirds of the judgments of project staff being "agree" or "strongly agree" to items on the Evaluating Evaluation Services survey addressing (a) positive impact of evaluation, (b) necessity of evaluation, and (c) improvements to their programs.

1979-80 Data: Based on the responses of 27 staff (17 special education consultants, 4 non-special education consultants, and 6 project managers/coordinators) 71% of the judgments made on the two items addressing evaluation's positive impact and necessity were "agree" or "strongly agree" and the mean judgment was 4.0.

ULTIMATE GOAL

Program staff act on relevant evaluation findings to increase the quantity and quality of services per unit of program cost.

Not addressed in 1979-80.

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Hammarskjold, Dag Markings New York: Knopf, 1978, pg. 7.

Patton, Michael Utilization-Focused Evaluation, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978.

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Appendix A: 1978-79 Survey Instrument

1. The most important thing we ought to change about the way programs are evaluated is:

2. The major problems I've experienced in working with Evaluation Services are:

3. The major benefits I have observed from the evaluation of special education programs are:

4. "The presence of Evaluation Service has had a positive impact in improving ESC-20 Special Education programs with which I am familiar." (Circle One)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. Rank order the six services provided by Evaluation Services listed below using the lines under 5a. Rank the most important service-1, the second most-2, and so forth. Then rate each service by circling the number under 5b.

	5a	5b				
		Not Useful	Of Minimal Use	Of Some Use	Definitely Useful	Very Useful
A. As a sounding board for ideas and/or a source of ideas	_____	1	2	3	4	5
B. Assistance with developing Objectives	_____	1	2	3	4	5
C. Needs Assessment	_____	1	2	3	4	5
D. Assessing the accomplishment of project objectives	_____	1	2	3	4	5
E. Assistance in formulating recommendations to improve programs	_____	1	2	3	4	5
F. Workshop evaluations	_____	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B: 1979-80 Survey Instrument

PART 1: Please complete the following sentences.

The most important benefits or services I receive from Evaluation Services are . . .

The greatest problems I experience in working with Evaluation Services are . . .

Evaluation Services really ought to change the way it . . .

PART II: The following items assess Evaluation Services' accomplishment of the following goal: *Evaluation Services' staff develop positive and productive working relationships with program staff.* For each of the following statements, circle the response that indicates how evaluation staff have worked with you.

Evaluation Services staff responsible for evaluation of my program:	Use this scale to rate items a-e:				
	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
a. work with me to find out what kind of information I want.	1	2	3	4	5
b. keep me informed of the progress of the evaluation.	1	2	3	4	5
c. present findings in a positive, constructive way.	1	2	3	4	5
d. work with me to interpret and use evaluation findings.	1	2	3	4	5
e. make a positive effort to understand my program, my goals, and the constraints I am facing.	1	2	3	4	5

PART III: These items assess Evaluation Services' accomplishment of the following goal: *Evaluation Services reports findings . . . to increase quantity and quality of service . . . by amounts commensurate with the cost of evaluation.*

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
a. The presence of Evaluation Services has had a <u>positive impact</u> in improving ESC-20 programs with which I am familiar.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Evaluation Services' <u>written reports</u> highlight those findings that could lead to improvement of our services.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Evaluation Services' staff highlight in discussions those findings that could lead to improvement of our services.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Based on my experiences with Evaluation Services, I believe evaluation is a necessary and important service.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C: Draft of 1980-81 Survey Instrument

Part I:

CHECK EACH AREA YOU BELIEVE EVALUATION SERVICES WORK HAS BEEN DEFINITELY
USEFUL TO YOU -- CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ As a sounding board for
ideas or a source of ideas | ☐ Assessing accomplishment
of project objectives |
| ☐ Assistance with proposal
objectives and evaluation sections | ☐ Program improvement |
| ☐ Needs Assessments | ☐ Program documentation |

ANY OTHERS?:

CHECK EACH AREA YOU BELIEVE HAS BEEN A DEFINITE PROBLEM WITH EVALUATION
SERVICES -- CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ We're hard to work with | ☐ Our work is of poor quality |
| ☐ We lack knowledge | ☐ Our work is too late |
| ☐ We're not there when you need us | ☐ We create too much paperwork |
| ☐ We do too little work | ☐ We take too much time |
| ☐ Our work is hard to understand | ☐ Our work is not relevant |

ANY OTHERS?:

EVALUATION SERVICES REALLY OUGHT TO CHANGE THE WAY IT...

Part II: This section contains in italics the goals of Evaluation Services and beneath each goal item(s) assessing that goal. For each item circle the response that indicates how strongly you agree or disagree with the item.

Evaluation Services staff develop positive and productive working relationships with program staff.

STRONGLY DISAGREE DISAGREE NEUTRAL AGREE STRONGLY AGREE

Evaluation Services staff work with me to find out what kind of information I want. 1 2 3 4 5

Evaluation Services staff make a positive effort to understand my program, my goals, and the constraints I am facing. 1 2 3 4 5

Evaluation Services staff keep me informed of the progress of my evaluation. 1 2 3 4 5

Evaluation Services staff present findings in a positive, constructive way. 1 2 3 4 5

Evaluation Services reports findings highlighting those which could be the basis for action...

Evaluation Services's written reports highlight those findings that could lead to improvement of our services. 1 2 3 4 5

Evaluation Services highlight in discussions those findings that could lead to improvement of our services. 1 2 3 4 5

Evaluation Services assists program staff in planning action based on evaluation findings.

Evaluation Services works with me to interpret and use evaluation findings. 1 2 3 4 5

The presence of Evaluation Services has had a positive impact in improving ESC-20 programs with which I am familiar. 1 2 3 4 5

Based on my experiences with Evaluation Services, I believe evaluation is a necessary and important service.

Program staff act on relevant evaluation findings...

Circle the item which best characterizes the usefulness of evaluation information to you.

1. I cannot act on the evaluation information I receive to improve my program.
2. I can act on evaluation information to make improvements in my services, but these are definitely minor improvements.
3. I can act on evaluation information to make improvements in my services, but these improvements, while important, are not critical.
4. I can act on evaluation information to make major improvements in my delivery of service.